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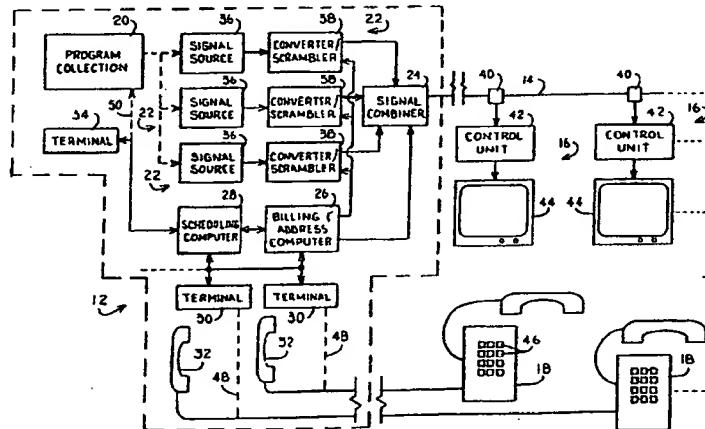
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(54) Title: TELEVISION BROADCAST SYSTEM FOR SELECTIVE TRANSMISSION OF VIEWER-CHOSEN PROGRAMS AT VIEWER-REQUESTED TIMES

(57) Abstract

A television broadcast system using land lines (14) is provided for real-time transmission of a viewer-chosen program at a viewer-requested time to the requesting viewer's television receiver (16). The preferred method includes the steps of providing a collection of stored programs (20), communicating the requesting viewer's choice of a program chosen from the collection (20) and a requested time for viewing the chosen program, selecting the chosen program from a collection (20), transmitting the chosen program at the requested time for viewing on the requesting viewer's receiver (16), and preventing intelligible viewing of the chosen program on other of the receivers (44), other than that which

specifically requested the program selection. The preferred system (10) includes a central unit (12), land lines (14), a plurality of viewer-associated receivers (16), and a plurality of viewer-associated telephone handsets (18). Customers can communicate with customer service representative at telephone units (32) at the central station (12). Alternatively, customers can use their telephones (18) to communicate directly with the scheduling computer (28). The signal sources (36), the converter/scramblers (38), and the signal combiner prepare the plurality of requested programs for transmission over land line (14). Billing and addressing is controlled by billing and address computer (26).



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TELEVISION BROADCAST SYSTEM FOR
SELECTIVE TRANSMISSION OF VIEWER-CHOSEN
PROGRAMS AT VIEWER-REQUESTED TIMES

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Background of the Invention

1. Field of the Invention

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The present invention relates to a community antenna television (CATV) system. More particularly, the present invention relates to a system in which a viewer can choose a program and request a time for viewing of the chosen program on the viewer's television receiver.

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2. Description of the Prior Art

With over half the homes in the United States now equipped with video cassette recorders, a major industry has developed which includes thousands of video stores for renting movies and other programs on video cassettes in order to satisfy a demand for over three billion rentals a year. One of the reasons video tape cassette rentals have become so popular is that the viewer can rent a desired program cassette from the video store's assortment and then view that program whenever desired. This is in contrast to conventional broadcast television or premium cable television in which the viewer neither chooses the program being transmitted nor the time at which it is transmitted.

Even with the advantages of cassette rental, certain problems are apparent. For example, the viewer must make a first round-trip to the video store to pick up the desired program cassette and then make a second round-trip to return the cassette. Additionally, the viewer may make a trip to the video store only to find that the movie is unavailable either because all of the available

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1 copies have already been rented, or that particular
video store does not stock the desired movie. If
such occurs, not only is the viewer inconvenienced,
but the video store also loses potential rental
5 revenue.

Furthermore, the existing system for
renting video cassettes presents some inherent
inefficiencies. For example, in order to minimize
inconvenience to the customer, the video store must
10 be located at a premium, high rent, location such as
a corner intersection or a shopping mall and pay the
high rent associated with the premium location.

Second, each video store must carry a
complete library of video taped programs most of
15 which are unused at any given time. For example, it
a video tape store may carry an inventory of over
5,000 program titles representing thousands more
video cassettes owing to the duplication of many of
the titles. The inventory problem is magnified if
20 duplicate cassettes are stocked in VHS and BETA
formats. At any given time, however, only a rela-
tively small percentage of the titles will be rented
which are typically the currently most popular pro-
grams. Even with such a large inventory, the video
store can satisfy relatively few requests for the
25 most popular programs. That is to say, even if a
number of copies of a currently popular program are
in stock, the demand for this program may far exceed
this number of copies and potential revenue is lost
while other titles lie idle.

30 Third, the inventory problem for video
rental stores is a growing one in that new titles
are released to the video market each month with the
result that the number of titles in a video store's
inventory grows by at least this amount each month.

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1 The physical space required to store these additional titles may grow at an even faster rate because more than one copy of each title may be purchased. In order to handle the ever increasing number of
5 cassettes, the video store must increase its storage capacity for which it must pay a higher rent because of the store's premium location.

10 In order to solve some of the problems associated with the video cassette rental industry, various prior art solutions have been proposed. For example, Patent No. 4,506,387 which is hereby incorporated by reference discloses a system in which a cable television system (CATV) may download a recording from a central location over its cable trunk line to a memory module included in the viewer's television receiver. The program is downloaded in non-real time, typically in about 30 seconds, and the viewer then activates the memory module to view the program stored therein. The '387 patent presents some disadvantages, however, in that the central location must be equipped to download the program in non-real time. Additionally, each viewer's receiver must be equipped with a memory module to store the downloaded program. Such equipment may be prohibitively expensive and may be also inefficient in that a viewer's receiver must be properly equipped even though a particular viewer may seldom, if ever, desire to take advantage of the capability.
15
20
25

30 Patent No. 4,381,522 which is hereby incorporated by reference discloses a system in which a viewer can telephone the cable company's central location and electronically select a specialized recording such as a commercial advertisement for broadcast over one of the unused channels of the cable television system. A computer then

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1 schedules the program, transmits it at the scheduled
time, and separately transmits a directory of all of
the scheduled programs on another unused channel.
The viewer then observes the directory channel to
5 see when the requested recording is scheduled, and
then turns to the channel indicated at the scheduled
time to view the program. The provision of the
directory channel encourages other viewers to view
one of the scheduled recordings also. The system as
10 disclosed in the '522 patent does not allow the
viewer to determine when the program is to be sche-
duled and furthermore provides no means by which
receivers other than the one of the requesting
viewer are prevented from viewing the scheduled
15 program.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention solves the problems
as outlined above. The invention hereof allows a
viewer to choose a program from a collection and to
view that program at a viewer-requested time on the
viewer's receiver for which the viewer is billed and
which also prevents non-requesting viewers from
intelligible viewing of the chosen program on their
associated receivers. This allows a viewer to
20 "rent" a program without the need for a VCR.
25

The present invention is advantageously
and preferably implemented in the context of a tele-
vision transmission system, typically a CATV system,
which uses land lines such as coaxial cables or
30 fiber optic cables for transmitting programs to a
plurality of subscriber's receivers. Preferably,
the television transmission system is an "address-
able" system in which selected programs are scram-
bled to prevent intelligible viewing thereof and in

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1 which a descrambling signal can then be addressed to
the receiver associated with the requesting viewer
which in turn prompts the included control unit to
descramble the program transmission for viewing on
5 that receiver.

10 The preferred method of the present invention involves the steps of providing a collection of stored programs, selecting a program chosen from the collection for transmission at a requested time in response to a request from a viewer, transmitting the chosen program in real-time over the system's land lines at the requested time, and preventing intelligible viewing of the chosen program at the requested time by receivers other than the requesting viewer's receiver. More particularly, the preferred method includes the steps of scrambling the transmission of the chosen program and transmitting decoder signals to the requesting viewer's receiver in order to allow intelligible viewing of the chosen program thereon only by the requesting viewer and thereby preventing intelligible viewing by others.

15 Additionally, the preferred method also includes the steps of transmitting the chosen program at the requested time over a selected channel and communicating the identity of the selected channel only to the requesting viewer.

20 In preferred forms, the method hereof includes the steps of transmitting address signals specific to the control unit associated with the requesting viewer and transmitting associated descrambler signals specific to the selected channel over which the chosen program is being transmitted.

25 Advantageously, the preferred method includes the steps of identifying a section of the

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1 land lines having a subset of receivers operably
coupled thereto, transmitting the chosen program
over the section of the land lines, identifying a
5 juncture between the section and the remaining
portion of the land lines, and preventing transmis-
sion of the chosen program therebeyond by use of a
blocking device located at the juncture.

10 The preferred apparatus includes a collec-
tion of stored programs, means for selectively
choosing certain ones of the programs for transmis-
sion, means for transmitting a chosen program at a
requested time, and a scheduling computer for sche-
duling program choices and requested times. The
15 preferred apparatus also includes computer means for
receiving information from the requesting viewer as
encoded signals preferably over telephone lines
using telephone touch-tones. In especially prefer-
red forms, the computer means is equipped for voice
communication with the requesting viewer either in
the form of synthetically generated voice signals or
20 prerecorded selected messages.

Other preferred aspects of the present
invention are explained hereinbelow.

Brief Description of the Drawing Figures

25 Figure 1 is schematic illustration of the
preferred configuration of the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a schematic illustration showing
the preferred interconnection between the configura-
tion of Fig. 1 and sections of the transmission
30 system.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments

The present invention is preferably imple-
mented in the context of a conventional community

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1 antenna television (CATV) system, the equipment and
operation of which are well understood by those
skilled in the art and which are explained in part
in the Electronics Engineer's Handbook, Second
5 Edition, which is hereby incorporated by reference.

Preferred system 10 (Figs. 1) includes
central unit 12, land lines 14, a plurality of
viewer-associated receivers 16, and a plurality of
viewer-associated telephone handsets 18.

10 Central unit 12 includes program collection 20, a plurality of signal transmitters 22, signal combiner 24, billing and address computer 26, scheduling computer 28, a plurality of input data computer terminals 30 having associated telephone units 32, and output schedule computer terminal 34.

15 Program collection 20 includes a plurality of programs stored on a medium allowing selective reproduction and real-time transmission thereof over land lines 14 for reception by and viewing on receiver 16 by an associated viewer. Preferably, the programs stored in collection 20 are stored on 3/4" video tape which allows for higher fidelity reproduction than conventional 1/2" video tape. Each program is preferably assigned and labeled with a catalog number, a list of which is stored in scheduling computer 28. Preferably, up to three copies of selected programs are included in collection 20 which to allow continuous transmission of ninety-minute programs at half-hour intervals if desired for currently popular programs.

20 As those skilled in the art will appreciate, the programs in collection 20 can be stored on a variety of media including compact disks, floppy disks, hard disks, conventional magnetic tape, electronic memory such as that disclosed in U.S. Patent

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1 No. 4,506,387, or the like. While storage on video tape is preferred, available technology and economic factors may dictate an alternative storage medium.

5 Signal transmitters 22 are conventional units commonly found in the "head end" of a typical CATV system. Signal transmitter 22 includes signal source 36 and converter/scrambler unit 38.

10 Signal source 36 in a typical CATV system is the origination point for signals received by way of antenna, microwave, land lines from a local television station, or a video cassette recorder (VCR). Preferred signal source 36 includes a 3/4" video cassette recorder (VCR) operable to receive and play video cassettes selected from collection 20 and to produce signals representative thereof for presentation to converter/scrambler unit 38.

15 Conventional converter/scrambler unit 38 receives signals from signal source 36 and converts those signals for output on a predetermined frequency channel. In a conventional system, these channels include low band, mid-band, high band, super band, and hyper band, which, depending upon the design of the system, may allow selection of up to seventy different channels for program transmission on a single coaxial cable trunk line. In the preferred system, unit 38 is operable to selectively scramble program transmissions.

20 Conventional signal combiner 24 receives the output signals from transmitters 22 on the various channels and combines those signals for transmission over land lines 14. Signal combiner 24 is also typically coupled with conventional billing and address computer 26.

25 Computer 26 is operable to transmit decoder signals by way of signal combiner 24 onto land

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1 lines 14 and thereby to receivers 16 which allows
intelligible viewing of scrambled program transmis-
sion on selected ones of receivers 16 and prevents
intelligible viewing on others. That is to say,
5 computer 16 keeps track of which viewers which have
subscribed to certain premium channels such HBO, and
periodically transmits decoder signals which include
address signals specific to receivers 16. Descram-
bling signals are typically associated with the
10 address signals which prompts the addressed receiver
16 to descramble the transmissions identified by the
associated descrambler signals. Receivers 16 which
do not receive descrambling signals associated with
their respective address signals prevent intelli-
gible viewing of the scrambled program transmission.
15

Computer 26 is also operable for producing
billing information as appropriate for the services
to which the individual viewers have subscribed. As
those skilled in the art will appreciate, the vari-
ous functions performed by computer 26 may be per-
20 formed by separate computers.

Scheduling computer 28 is preferably a
minicomputer and is operably coupled with terminals
30, with computer 26, and with terminal 34. As will
be explained further hereinbelow, computer 28 re-
ceives data representative of the program choices
25 and requested times for viewing thereof and presents
outputs at terminal 34 whereby the chosen program
can be selected from collection 20 for transmission
by the respective signal transmitter 22 at the
30 requested time.

In one embodiment, viewers communicate
their program choices and requested viewing times by
way of conventional telephone handsets 18 connected
through the local telephone network. Respective

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1 customer service representatives answer the incoming calls over phone units 32 and then enter the information communicated from the viewers into scheduling computer 28 by way of respective terminals 30, each
5 of which includes a conventional data entry keyboard and monitor.

Land lines 14 typically include coaxial cables which transmit the programs from program unit 12 to receivers 16. Receivers 16 are conventionally coupled with land lines 14 by way of respective cable taps 40.

10 Receivers 16 each include control unit 42 and television 44. Control unit 42 converts a program transmission received from land lines 14 on one of the various transmission channels to an output on a preselected channel for reception by television 24.

15 Control unit 42 is also operable to selectively descramble certain of the transmissions received by way of land lines 14 from central unit 12. Each control unit 42 is equipped to receive decoder signals to detect its specific address signal from computer 26 and in response to descramble the transmission identified by the descrambling signals associated with the address signals.

20 In the preferred method of operating system 10, each subscribing household is provided with a catalog of the programs included in collection 20 along with the associated program identification number by which scheduling computer 28 identifies the program and by which they are labeled and stored in collection 20. Preferably, monthly supplements to the program catalog are provided as new programs are added to collection 20 and new catalogs are periodically issued incorporating the previous

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1 supplements as needed. The program listings in the
catalog are preferably arranged alphabetically and
also by subject category to facilitate selection of
a desired type of program. Collection 20 includes
5 full-length movies, recordings of previously trans-
mitted regularly scheduled commercial broadcasts and
other programs of interest to the subscribers. Each
subscribing household is preferably provided with a
confidential identification number in order to prevent
10 unauthorized ordering and thereby billing of a
program.

After a viewer has chosen a program, the viewer then uses telephone handset 18 to place a telephone call over the conventional telephone network to the telephone number associated with central unit 12. Customer service representatives answer the incoming telephone calls to whom the viewer communicates the program choice and requested time along with the viewer's name and confidential identification number. The customer service representative then enters this information by way of terminal 30 into computer 28.

In accordance with conventional computer programming techniques well known to those skilled in the art, computer 28 first determines whether the viewer's name and identification number match. If not, this fact is communicated to the representative who informs the viewer that the request cannot be satisfied without a correct match. If the customer name and identification number do match, computer 28 then determines whether the chosen program has been already previously scheduled at the requested time. If such is the case, computer 28 need not reschedule the chosen program, but rather needs only prompt address computer 26 to transmit proper decoding

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1 signals to the viewer's control unit 16 at the requested time to allow the viewer's receiver to descramble the program and to enter the billing information.

5 If the chosen movie has not been previously scheduled at the requested time, computer 28 determines whether a channel is available at the requested time. If yes, computer 28 selects an available channel and schedules this channel for 10 transmission of the chosen program at the requested time. Computer 28 then presents confirmation of this to the customer service representative on the monitor associated with terminal 30 along with the channel number which is then communicated to the 15 viewer.

Computer 28 provides scheduling information as output by way of terminal 34. In the preferred form, an operator reads the output from terminal 34 either presented on an associated monitor or as a hard copy print out. In response, the 20 operator selects the chosen program from collection 20 and inserts into the appropriate VCR included in signal source 36 which is associated with the scheduled channel. That is to say, each transmitter 22 is associated with a specific output channel and the 25 information provided from computer 28 by way of terminal 34 instructs the operator which VCR is to be used for transmitting the chosen program at the requested time. In the alternative, system 10 could be arranged such that any unused signal transmitter 30 22 can be selected and then adjusted to transmit on the scheduled channel. At the requested time the operator activates the appropriate VCR in order to transmit the program which is scrambled and convert-

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1 ed by unit 38 and presented on the selected channel
to signal combiner 24 and onto land lines 14.

5 Computer 28, upon scheduling the chosen
program at the requested time, also interacts with
computer 26 so that computer 26 sends appropriate
decoder signals at the requested time and during
transmission of the program to receiver 16 associ-
ated with the requesting viewer. The decoder sig-
nals include address signals specific to control
10 unit 16 associated with the requesting viewer and
prompts control unit 42 to descramble the chosen
program in accordance with the descrambler signals
associated with the address signal. In this way,
the requesting viewer can view the program on the
viewer-associated television 44. By scrambling the
15 transmission, and by not providing a descrambling
signal to other receivers, subscribers other than
the requesting viewer are prevented from intelli-
gible viewing of the chosen program.

20 Upon transmission of the chosen program at
the requested time, billing and address computer 26
is programmed to automatically add the specified
program charge to the requesting viewer's monthly
bill.

25 If there are no available channels at the
requested time, computer 28 is preferably programmed
to determine the nearest available time frame during
which a channel is available or to determine the
nearest available time when the chosen program is
already scheduled for transmission. This informa-
30 tion is then presented to the customer service
representative on terminal 30 who in turn communi-
cates this information to the requesting viewer who
may thereupon select one of the alternative times.
For example, if the requesting viewer wishes to see

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1 a very popular program at a certain time, and all of
the channels are already scheduled for that time,
none of which include that chosen program, an unused
channel may be available shortly before or after the
5 requested time or the chosen program may be already
be rescheduled at a nearby time whereupon the re-
questing viewer can select one of these.

10 As discussed above, scheduling computer 28
is programmed to ensure that the viewer's identifi-
cation number matches the name of the requesting
viewer, or the requesting viewer's address, and so
forth. As a further check, computer 28 can be pro-
grammed to also include the requesting viewer's
15 telephone number, and upon being provided with this
information, can double check this against the
confidential identification number and the request-
ing viewer's name and address. This provides addi-
tional assurance that unauthorized persons do not
schedule programs which would be billed against
20 another subscriber's account.

25 As those skilled in the art will appreci-
ate, the requirement for a customer service repre-
sentative to answer telephone 32 can be eliminated
by the provision of a so-called "auto-dial" device
which would allow the requesting viewer to communi-
cate directly with scheduling computer 28 by provid-
ing appropriate encoded signals such as those pro-
vided by buttons 46 as touch-tone signals from
telephone handset 18. Such systems are well known
to those skilled in the art and are commonly used in
30 banking services whereby customers can conduct
transactions with their financial accounts. Such
systems often include voice response systems which
can be incorporated in computer 28 to provide verbal
messages by way of synthesized voice or prerecorded

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1 verbal messages. The requesting viewer can respond
to inquiries by the computer by entering the appropriate codes on push buttons 46. Such an interconnection with computer 28 by way of terminal 30 is
5 indicated by the dashed lines 48.

10 Those skilled in the art will also appreciate that the information from the requesting viewer can be communicated to central unit 12 by using land lines 14 such as with an interactive cable system. Such systems are well known such as those described in U.S. Patent Nos 4,290,142, 4,408,345, and 4,710,955 which are hereby incorporated by reference.

15 As discussed above in connection with U.S. Patent No. 4,506,387, program collection 20 can include programs stored in electronic memory. If such is preferred, computer 28 can be connected directly with collection 20 as represented by line 50. In addition, collection 20 can be directly coupled with signal sources 36 as illustrated by lines 52. With such an arrangement, the requirement for an operator to physically select the programs from collection 20 and in to insert them in the appropriate VCR is eliminated. That is to say, upon instructions from scheduling computer 28, collection 20 is operable to cause the chosen program to be transmitted directly to the appropriate signal source 36 for the scheduled channel at the requested time.

30 While the present invention is discussed in the environment of a conventional CATV system using coaxial cables such as land lines 14, the present invention is also useful in the context wherein land lines 14 are fiber optic cables or telephone lines. Fiber optic cables have the capa-

- 16 -

1 bility of carrying many more channels than a coaxial
 cable with repeaters spaced further apart and with
 somewhat greater immunity to external noise. In
5 such a system, conventional telephone communication
 may also be provided over such a fiber optic cable
 or, in the alternative, a separate key pad, key-
 board, or the like can be included as part of re-
 ceiver 16 whereby the requesting viewer can enter
 data representative of the chosen program and
10 requested time for transmission over the land lines
 14 directly to computer 28.

15 A typical cable television system using a
 coaxial cable as a trunk line may have upwards of
 fifty channels unused for regularly scheduled trans-
 missions. With the potential for a thousands of
 receivers connected to the system, fifty unused
 channels may not be adequate to supply the demand
 viewer-chosen program viewing. It should be appre-
 ciated, however, that in this example, fifty avail-
20 able channels can still satisfy the program choice
 demands of many thousands of subscribers. For
 example, fifty channels transmitting the fifty most
 popular programs of the day may satisfy up to 80% of
 the program requests. It would not be unexpected
 that many subscribers may request the most popular
25 program. This, coupled with the fact that all of
 the subscribers will not likely be requesting movies
 at the same time, may allow fifty available channels
 to serve many subscribers.

30 Nevertheless, there may be some upper
 limit as to the number of subscribers that the
 available channels can adequately serve. In order
 to provide the optimum service to the subscribers in
 a system, the present invention encompasses the
 configuration as illustrated in Fig. 2. A typical

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1 CATV system includes a head end 52 at which the
transmitted program originates and which in turn
transmits the programs on the various channels by
way of land lines 14. In the preferred embodiment
5 as illustrated in Fig. 2, land lines 14 are further
designated to include a plurality of sections of
which sections 54 and 56 are illustrated. Each sec-
tion 54, 56 includes a respective subset 58 and 60
of receivers respectively coupled thereto. Each
10 section 54, 56 and so forth is respectively coupled
to the remaining portions of land lines 14 at a
respective node or juncture 62, 64.

15 In the preferred embodiment of the present
invention, a central unit is provided for each
subsection. Two such central units 12 and 66 are
illustrated and are respectively coupled via lines
68 and 70 with respective sections 54 and 56.
Furthermore, respective blocking devices 72 and 74
are provided at junctures 62 and 64 respectively.

20 Blocking devices 72 and 74 are preferably
low pass filters which allow transmissions from head
end 52 transmitted at the lower frequency channels
to pass unimpeded therethrough. Viewer-chosen
programming is preferably transmitted at the higher
frequency channels directly to the respective sec-
tions 54, 56. Blocking devices 72 and 74 prevent
25 transmission of these higher frequency channels
beyond their respective sections so that they do not
interfere with one another. That is to say, each
program unit 12 and 66 can broadcast viewer-chosen
programs on the same channel frequencies but the
30 sections are isolated from one another by the block-
ing devices.

Sections of land lines 14 can be identi-
fied and designated as desired by the proper place-

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1 ment of a blocking device such that each program
unit can adequately serve the program requests of
the viewers associated with the subset of receivers
included in each subsection. For example, if a CATV
5 system has 50,000 subscribers, and it is determined
that fifty channels can adequately satisfy the
viewer-chosen program requests of 10,000 viewers,
five sections of 10,000 receivers each would be
10 designated with a blocking device installed at the
junction between each designated section and the
remaining portions of the land lines. In this way,
transmissions produced by separate central units on
the same channels to separate sections would not
interfere with one another. This arrangement effec-
15 tively multiplies the number of available channels
for viewer-chosen programs.

As preferred, central units 12, 66 and so forth, are located in physical proximity with head end 52 to take advantage of already existing equipment. It should be appreciated, however, that even with multiple central units, multiple scheduling computers, billing, and address computers may not be needed. That is to say, a single set of appropriately selected computers can serve all of the central units. Additionally, economy of a scale may dictate that all of the central units use a common program collection 20 in order to minimize the size of the inventory. Furthermore, the various program units may also share a common set of incoming telephone lines for communicating with requesting viewers.

As an alternative, however, and depending upon the configuration of the CATV network and the economics involved, it may be desirable to locate a totally independent and free-standing program unit

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1 physically adjacent its associated section of the
land lines or physically adjacent another location
such as the central administrative office of the CATV
transmission system. That is to say, those skilled
5 in the art will appreciate that the physical loca-
tion of the program unit and whether multiple pro-
gram units can use common equipment is a matter of
design choice dictated by technology, economics, and
so forth.

10 Those skilled in the art will also appre-
ciate that blocking devices 62, 64, and so forth may
include distribution repeaters or amplifiers which
are designed to amplify the frequency channels
emanating from head end, but by their nature inher-
15 ently block passage of the higher frequency channels
from the various sections to the remaining portions
of land lines 14. This can be implemented by coupl-
ing line 68, immediately "downstream" of the repeater
nearest juncture 62. Other repeaters downstream
20 of this blocking repeater receive and amplify all
the incoming transmissions including the transmis-
sions from the head end and those injected at junc-
ture 62.

25 As should now be apparent from the de-
scription above, the present invention allows a
requesting viewer to choose a program for viewing at
a requested time on the television receiver associ-
ated with the requesting viewer. The convenience
provided thereby eliminates the need for the viewer
30 to drive to a video store to pickup a chosen movie
on video tape and to again repeat the trip to return
the movie.

35 Additionally, the present invention mini-
mizes the risk that the viewer will be unable to
view the chosen program at the viewer requested

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1 time. This risk is minimized for two reasons.
First, the preferred embodiment hereof designates
sections of the land lines which are matched from a
capacity standpoint with its associated program unit
5 in order to satisfy the demands of the viewers
associated therewith. Secondly, the present invention
allows as many viewers as are connected to the
system to choose the same program at the same time.
This is because once the chosen program is scheduled
10 for transmission on a particular channel, additional
viewers can be added simply by transmitting the
appropriate descrambling signals to the requesting
viewer's receiver. In this way, many viewers can
choose the currently most popular program rather
15 than just a few as determined by the number of
cassette copies available as with prior art video
stores.

The present invention also avoids the need
for premium rental space in which to store a large
20 inventory of programs and eliminates the many duplications
of inventory carried by the many video stores in a territory.

Having thus described the preferred embodiments
of the present invention, the following is
claimed as new and desired to be secured by Letters
25 Patent:

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Claims

5 1. A method of operating a television transmission system using land lines for transmitting television programs for reception by a plurality of receivers coupled with land lines for viewing the programs on the receivers by viewers respectively associated therewith, the system including means for selectively preventing intelligible viewing of certain programs by certain receivers, said method comprising the steps of:

10 providing a collection of stored programs stored on a medium allowing selective reproduction and real-time transmission of said stored programs over the land lines;

15 selecting a prospective chosen program from said collection for transmission at a requested time in response to a request therefor from a requesting viewer;

20 transmitting said chosen program in real-time over the land lines at said requested time for reception by and viewing on a receiver associated with said requesting viewer;

25 and

 preventing intelligible viewing of said chosen program at said requested time on receivers other than said receiver associated with said requesting viewer.

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2. The method as set forth in claim 1,
the system including --

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scrambler means operably coupled with said land
lines for selectively scrambling the
transmission of certain of the program
transmissions in order to prevent intelligible
viewing thereof on the receivers,
a plurality of control units respectively
corresponding to and operably associated
with the receivers and operably coupled
with the land lines, each control unit
being operable for receiving decoder
signals and in response thereto for selectively
descrambling certain ones of the
program transmissions for allowing intelligible
viewing thereof on the associated
receiver; and

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decoder signal means operably coupled with the
land lines and operable for selectively
transmitting decoder signals for reception
by the receivers in order to allow intelligible
viewing of certain ones of the programs
on selected ones of the receivers, said method further including the
steps of --

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scrambling the transmission of said chosen
program in order to prevent intelligible
viewing thereof on the receivers, and
transmitting decoder signals for receipt by
said receiver associated with said requesting
viewer in order to allow intelligible
viewing of said chosen program
thereon.

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1 3. The method as set forth in claim 1,
the system including means for simultaneously trans-
mitting a plurality of programs on a respective
plurality of identifiable channels, the receivers
5 being operable for tuning to a selected channel,
said method further including the steps of --
transmitting said chosen program during said
requested time over a selected channel,
and
10 communicating the identity of said selected
channel only to said requesting viewer.

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1 4. The method as set forth in claim 2,
the system including means for transmitting a plu-
rality of programs on a respective plurality of
identifiable channels, the control units being oper-
5 able for tuning to a selected channel, the decoder
signals including address signals respectively
specific to the control units and descrambler sig-
nals respectively associated with the address sig-
nals and respectively specific to identify selected
10 transmissions each control unit being responsive to
specific address signals and the descrambler signals
associated therewith for descrambling program trans-
missions on the channels identified by the descram-
bler signals, said method further including the
15 steps of --

 selecting a channel for transmission,
 transmitting said chosen program during said
 requested time on said selected channel,
 communicating the identity of said selected
 channel only to said requesting viewer,
20 transmitting address signals specific to the
 control unit associated with the request-
 ing viewer's receiver and transmitting
 associated descrambler signals specific to
 identify said selected channel.

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1 5. The method as set forth in claim 1,
further including the steps of --

5 identifying a section of the land lines having
a subset of receivers operably coupled
thereto wherein said subset includes a
plurality of receivers less than the total
number of receivers included in the sys-
tem, and remaining portions of the land
lines having a plurality of receivers
other than said subset coupled thereto,
10 transmitting said chosen program over said
section of the land lines,
identifying a juncture between said section and
said remaining portion, and
15 preventing transmission of said chosen program
beyond the juncture from said section to
said remaining portion by use of a block-
ing device located at said juncture.

20 6. The method as set forth in claim 1,
further including the steps of --

25 providing computer means operable for receiving
from said requesting viewer encoded sig-
nals representative of said chosen pro-
gram, said requested time, and the iden-
tity of said receiver associated with said
requesting viewer,
30 said selecting step including the step of
selecting said chosen program from said
collection in response to said encoded
signals from said requesting viewer.

35 7. The method as set forth in claim 1,
said encoded signals including telephone touch-tone
signals.

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8. The method as set forth in claim 6,
further including the step of providing said computer
means with voice interaction capability and using
said computer for providing voice communication to
said requesting viewer.

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9. The method as set forth in claim 1,
further including the steps of providing scheduling
computer means operable for scheduling multiple
program choices and multiple requested times.

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10. The method as set forth in claim 9,
further including the steps of --
providing computer means for providing billing
information correlated with the requesting
viewer's chosen program, and
providing a bill to said requesting viewer
corresponding to said chosen program.

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11. The method as set forth in claim 1,
further including the step of providing electronic
memory means having said collection stored therein.

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12. The method as set forth in claim 1,
the land lines including coaxial cables.

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13. The method as set forth in claim 1,
the land lines including fiber optic cables.

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14. In a television transmission system using land lines for transmitting programs for reception by a plurality of television receivers coupled with the land lines for viewing of the programs on the receivers by viewers respectively associated therewith, and including communicating means for communicating information as encoded signals over the land lines from said viewers, the improvement comprising:

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a collection of stored programs stored on a medium allowing selective reproduction and real-time transmission over the land lines for reception and viewing thereof by selected receivers;

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computer means operably coupled with the communicating means for receiving encoded signals from a requesting viewer, said encoded signals being representative of a requesting viewer's choice of a program chosen from said collection and said requesting viewer's requested time for viewing of said chosen program on a receiver associated with said requesting viewer and for providing output information representative thereof;

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selecting means operably associated with said collection and said computer means and responsive to said output information for selecting said chosen program from said collection; and

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transmitting means operably associated with and responsive to said selecting means for transmitting said chosen program over the land lines at said requested time for reception by and viewing on said requesting viewer's receiver.

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15. The apparatus as set forth in claim
14, the communicating means including telephone
lines, the encoded signals including touch-tone
signals, said computer means including means for
providing voice communication to said requesting
viewer over the telephone lines.

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16. The apparatus as set forth in claim
15, the system including means for transmitting
programs on a respective plurality of channels,
said computer means including means for sche-
duling one of the channels for transmis-
sion of said chosen program thereon and
including means for providing voice com-
munication over the telephone lines iden-
tifying the channel on which said chosen
program is to be transmitted to the re-
questing viewer.

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- 1 17. In a television transmission system
 using land lines for transmitting programs for
 reception by a plurality of television receivers
 coupled with land lines for viewing of the programs
5 on the receivers by viewers respectively associated
 therewith, the system further including communicat-
 ing means for receiving information over land lines
 from the viewers, the land lines including a section
 thereof having a subset of the receivers coupled
10 therewith wherein said subset includes a plurality
 of receivers less than the total number of receivers
 included in the system, the remaining portion of the
 land lines having a plurality of receivers other
 than the subset coupled therewith, the section and
15 the remaining portion being coupled with one another
 at a juncture, the improvement comprising:
 a collection of stored programs stored on a
 medium allowing selective reproduction and
 real-time transmission thereof over the
 land lines for reception and viewing
20 thereof by selected receivers;
 receiving means operably associated with the
 communicating means for receiving informa-
 tion from a requesting viewer, said infor-
 mation including a requesting viewer's
25 choice of a program chosen from said
 collection and a requested time for view-
 ing of said program on a receiver associ-
 ated with said requesting viewer, said
 associated receiver being included in the
 subset of receivers;
30 selecting means operably associated with said
 collection and operably associated with
 and responsive to said receiving means for

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- 1 selecting said chosen program from said collection;
- 5 transmitting means operably associated with said selecting means and coupled with the subsection of the land lines for transmission of said chosen program at said requested time for reception by and viewing one on said associated receivers; and
- 10 blocking means located in the vicinity of the juncture for preventing transmission of the chosen program therebeyond from the section into the remaining portions of the land lines.
- 15 18. The apparatus as set forth in claim 17, the system including means for simultaneously transmitting selected programs over a respective plurality of channels included in a specified group of channels,
- 20 said transmitting means including means for transmitting said chosen program on a selected channel other than the channel included in said selected group of channels,
- 25 said blocking means including structure allowing passage of programs being transmitted on the channels included in the selected group and structure for preventing passage of transmissions on said selected channel from the section to the remaining portion
- 30 of the system.

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19. The apparatus as set forth in claim
18, said selected channel being at a relatively
higher frequency than the channels in the specified
group.

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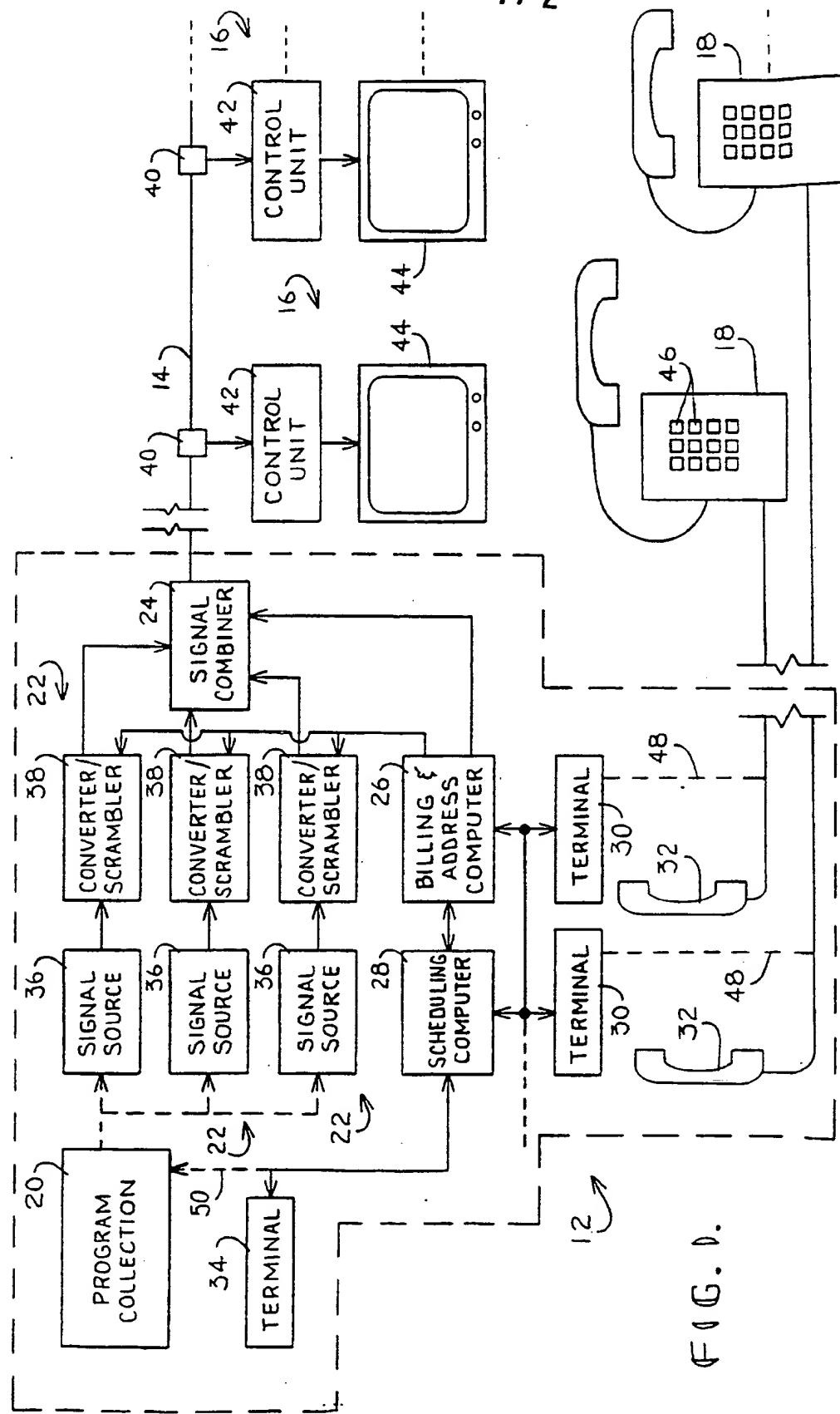


FIG. 1.

SUBSTITUTE SHEET

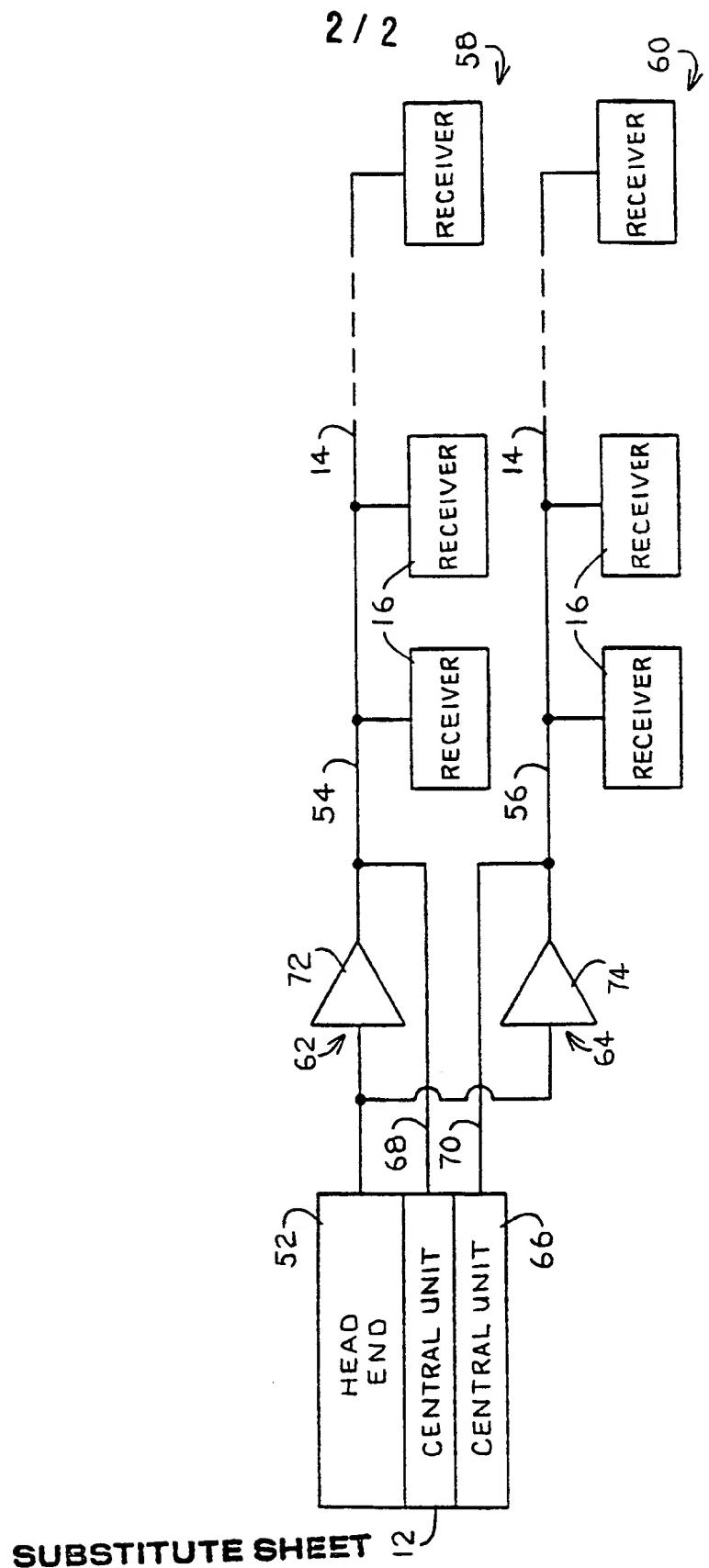


FIG. 2.

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No. PCT/US89/02507

| | | |
|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| I. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER (If several classification symbols apply, indicate all) ¹⁾ | | |
| According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both National Classification and IPC | | |
| INT. CL. 4 H04N 7/167 | U.S. CL. 380/10 | |
| II. FIELDS SEARCHED | | |
| Minimum Documentation Searched ²⁾ | | |
| Classification System : | Classification Symbols | |
| U.S. | 358/85,86 380/3,5,7,10 455/3,4,5,6 | |
| Documentation Searched other than Minimum Documentation to the Extent that such Documents are Included in the Fields Searched ³⁾ | | |
| III. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT ⁴⁾ | | |
| Category ⁵⁾ | Citation of Document, ⁶⁾ with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages ⁷⁾ | , Relevant to Claim No. ⁸⁾ |
| A | US, A, 4,251,691 Published 17 February 1981, Kakihara et al. | 1,14,17 |
| Y | US, A, 4,381,522 Published 26 April 1983, Lambert, abstract. | 1-19 |
| A | US, A, 4,710,955 Published 01 December 1987, Kauffman. | 1,14,17 |
| A, P | US, A, 4,761,684 Published 02 August 1988, Clark et al. | 1,14,17 |
| Y, P | US, A, 4,763,191 Published 09 August 1988, Gordan et al., abstract. | 1-19 |
| A, P | US, A, 4,785,472 Published 15 November 1988, Shapiro. | 1,14,17 |
| <p>* Special categories of cited documents: ¹⁰⁾</p> <p>"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance</p> <p>"E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date</p> <p>"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)</p> <p>"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means</p> <p>"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed</p> <p>"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention</p> <p>"X" document of particular relevance: the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step</p> <p>"Y" document of particular relevance: the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art</p> <p>"S" document member of the same patent family</p> | | |
| IV. CERTIFICATION | | |
| Date of the Actual Completion of the International Search : | Date of Mailing of this International Search Report : | |
| 08 August 1989 | 06 SEP 1989 | |
| International Searching Authority : | Signature of Authorized Officer : | |
| ISA/US | <i>Bernarr Earl Gregory</i> Bernarr Earl Gregory | |

- International Application No. PCT/US89/02507

III. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT (CONTINUED FROM THE SECOND SHEET)

| Category | Citation of Document, ¹⁶ with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages ¹⁷ | Relevant to Claim No ¹⁸ |
|----------|--|------------------------------------|
| Y, P | US, A, 4,792,849 Published 20 December 1988, Mc Calley et al., abstract. | 1-19 |